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ABSTRACT

Speech instructors who teach English as a second language to international students are trying to help those students acquire a basic minimal command of English for success or survival in their education and do not require them to attain the fluency expected of native-born speakers of English. At one junior college where foreign student enrollment has increased dramatically, the problems in teaching English as a foreign language are related to the minimal grasp of English the students have and the range of ability in each class. Because of these difficulties, the instructor has found it useful to use a variety of materials as the basis for teaching, including menus from local restaurants, newspapers, texts from the students' courses in written English, and the state drivers' handbook. Class discussions stem from problems faced by the students, such as moving from a rigid society to one with fewer restrictions, lack of awareness of American taboos, financial problems, politics, time concept, and exploitation by local businesses. (TJ)

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INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: TEACHING STRATEGIES, RESOURCES AND MATERIALS FOR TEACHING ESL or HOW TO CHANGE SABAH AL-KHAIR INTO GOOD MORNING

by

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The idea that education can make a major contribution to understanding between peoples, societies and nations is not new. Yet, it is only within the last decade that institutions of higher learning have seriously come to grips with the problem.

The one major problem that most instructors who teach international students face is how to improve the learning situation and the social relations within their particular discipline.

The task of working with these particular students and striving to improve education necessitates the use of new instructional strategies. It is a task that suggests areas of challenge and potential growth in intercultural communication study. It certainly has implications for teacher training and curriculum development.

There is a tremendous amount of literature on intercultural communication. Unfortunately, these materials are not readily accessible in a form and in a manner that lend themselves to ease of utility of application.

Many instructors recognize the importance of keeping up with the latest developments in theory and practice. One problem is that researchers too often do not have the instructor in mind for the eventual application of their theories and research. On the other hand, instructors tend to be overburdened in such a way that they have neither time nor the resources to keep up with the publications in the field, or to participate in any of the numerous conferences that explore and analyse new developments and new teaching strategies.

Since January 1977 I have been involved with the teaching of English as a Second Language. Up to that time I had not had any experience with or training for this particular assignment. It just sort of happened.

For some reason, (I'm not sure anyone really knows why.) St. Petersburg Junior College suddenly found itself inundated with foreign students. They were there and we had to provide for them. To meet the needs of the international student -- (To set the record straight, allow me to say that when I refer to international students I am speaking about a student for whom English is a second language.) to meet their needs sections of courses for international students only were established in Developmental Composition, Freshman Composition I and II, Reading Techniques, Introduction to Speech, Humanities, American Government and Speech for Foreign Students.

It was decided to establish special sections because students from these countries have such monumental language problems that special sections were needed to help them succeed academically. It is the feeling of the faculty at St. Petersburg Junior College that English will remain at most a second language when they return to their native lands. Their purpose for being here is to acquire a basic minimal command of English for success or survival in their education in an English-speaking country. It is our intent then to help them acquire a basic command of English and not to require of them the fluency we expect of native-born speakers of English.

Before getting into some of the teaching strategies I have and am employing in the teaching of English as a Second Language, I would like to give you some background on the foreign student community at St. Petersburg Junior College.

Prior to 1977 the number of foreign students enrolled at St. Petersburg Junior College any one session rarely exceeded 40 - 50 students and the majority of these were from countries where English was either the language of instruction or a required second language. Today the issue of international education at St. Petersburg Junior College is one of increasing intensity. There have been recent developments in this area for which there are few, if any, precedents. Less developed countries with solid secondary educational systems and with expanding economies, but with inadequate higher education facilities and deserve educational opportunities for their citizens. These countries are relying on the assistance of the U.S. colleges to provide places for education of students they cannot accommodate at home.

At St. Petersburg Junior College the flow of foreign students in the past was controlled by financial constraints of the applicant and very few of the students came from sponsored groups. Today because of revenues generated by OPEC countries, these constraints have been significantly altered and a large number of sponsored students are currently either enrolled or applying to the college.

Acheck with the Admissions Office revealed the following information:

TRENDS IN ENROLLMENTS
1972 - 1978

	Total Enrollments		Foreign Enrollments		
School Year	Opening Fall Enrollment	Annual % Increase	Opening Fall Enrollment	Annual % Increase	As a % of Total
1972-73	9,204	---	31	---	0.34
1973-74	9,670	5.1	34	9.7	0.35
1974-75	10,604	0.1	55	61.8	0.52
1975-76	12,492	17.8	63	14.6	0.49
1976-77	12,900	3.3	139	120.6	1.08
1977-78	13,229	2.6	313	125.2	2.37
1978-79	14,584	10.2	478	52.7	3.26
Increase in Total Enrollments 1972-78:		9,204 - 14,584		58.45%	
Increase in Foreign Enrollments 1972-78:			31 - 478	1,541.94%	

The 478 figure does not include 137 students who are classified as Immigrant Aliens so, in fact, there are 615 international students currently enrolled.

The national origin or these students is overwhelmingly Arab, primarily Saudi Arabian and Iranian. The range of English fluency and competency in both speech or writing is great -- from bare minimum to the very sophisticated. The motivation of the students also varies greatly.

It may be helpful to you to know something about foreign student categories. Foreign students are classified by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) into three major categories; these are:

Non-immigrant Aliens
Immigrant Aliens
Refuges

Non-immigrant Aliens - Under this status the INS issued four types of visas.

Diplomatic (A1)
Student (F1)
Exchange Visitor (J1)
Visitor for Pleasure (B2)

Most international students at St. Petersburg Junior College are attending under a student visa (F1). This type of visa requires that the student must maintain full-time enrollment status, have proficiency in English communications and have sufficient funds to satisfy educational expenses. Also, while attending on a student visa, the student is not permitted to work unless special permission is obtained from INS. If a student falls below full-time status, the College is required to notify INS. Diplomatic visas (A1) are held by a few students from Royal Families of OPEC countries. Exchange visitor (J1) visas are held by a very few students sent to the United States to learn and up-grade business skills. Visitors for Pleasure visas (B2) are held by persons who may be "shopping" for a college. If accepted by an institution, their status is changed to Student (F1).

Immigrant Alies - These individuals have come to the United States under regular immigration quotas established by the U.S. Government. For most purposes an immigrant alien's status is the same as for citizens of the United States so fas as college enrollment is concerned.

Refugees - Refugees are not required to meet INS requirements of a full time course load, English proficiency, or sufficient funds. State Board of Education Rules govern refugees the same as immigrant aliens.

Form I-20 - Certificate of Eligibility issued by the college

Form I-538 - Extension of Stay, School Transfer, or Permission to Accept or continue Employment

TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language - Score of 450

LOCAL TEST OF ENGLISH - Test of English as a foreign language developed and graded by the Testing and English areas

Currently the Division of Communications on the St. Petersburg Campus is providing 26 special sections for 587 of the 612 foreign students enrolled. Fourteen faculty members have anywhere from one to four sections.

As might be expected these students encounter many problems -- problems that center around the social, cultural and educational difference between this country and theirs. I will speak to their problems later. Right now I would like to share with you some of the problems I have encountered in teaching English as a Second Language.

During my first encounter back in January 1977, the first couple of days were spent with each student telling us a little bit about himself and his native country. I had hung a map of the world on the wall so we were able to see in what part of the world each student resided in relation to St. Petersburg, Florida. This exercise also gave me some indication of what level of proficiency in the English language each student had reached. There was quite a diversity of ability.

Most of the students had a minimal grasp of the English language. Many of them had attended the English Language Service Center at Eckerd College. ELS offers an intensive nine-month course in the English language. Upon completion

the student is supposed to be able to compete with American students in all college level courses. For various reasons, very few of the students complete the nine-months program.

Because of the wide spread in speaking and understanding English, I decided to play each day by ear. By sitting in a circle and rapping I was able to determine where they were experiencing problems. Eating out and buying groceries presented difficulties for them. I went to all the fast-food restaurants and some conventional restaurants in the area around the college and obtained copies of their menus. So in a sense, menus became our first text book. (I should interject here that when I took over the course there were no text books or prepared teaching materials.) This in turn led to another resource -- cook books with pictures. Several of the items on the menus were unknown to the students and the pictures in the cook books were used as a starting point for discussion.

To help them with their grocery shopping I brought copies of the food ads from Thursday's paper to class. Both of these resources, menus and newspapers, worked well for me.

On the first "go round" I audio-taped each student. This enabled them to hear themselves and it gave me an opportunity to study their speech patterns. Instead of the audio-only exercise I now interview each student and have it video-tape recorded. They enjoy seeing themselves and it allows me the opportunity of seeing as well as hearing them and hopefully enables me to put a face with a name. I make a sincere effort to know first names -- not an easy task when you have upwards of forty students with names like Mohammed, Bandor, Saud, Yousef, Abdullah and Ibrahim, to list a few.

I constantly urge them to make notes of problems they encounter in other classes and in their social encounters -- and to bring these to class and we will work on them. Occasionally they slip in a word or phrase that normally would not be used in a convent. In these instances I'm not sure if they're putting me on or are for real.

Most of them are also taking courses in written English. These courses require text books. I encourage them to bring the texts with them to speech class. I have them read the short stories in the texts. With this we work on word meaning and pronunciation. The texts are:

> Yesterday and Today in the USA -- an intermediate ESL reader, by Anna Harris Live. (Prentice-Hall)
>
> and
>
> Idiom Drills for Students of English as a Second Language, by George P. McCollum. (Crowell)

Working with the latter book certainly pointed up to me what a complicated language we speak in this country.

The Florida Drivers' Handbook has been a useful aid. All the students want to get an American drivers' license (and expensive cars), and we work on the requirements for a license in class.

American holidays can be a cause of bewilderment to the foreign students. Depending on the time of the year, I prepare a hand-out about the particular holiday and have appropriate decorations and food and drink. We had an indoor picnic for the Fourth of July. Making and talking about their personal shield is a productive experience.

There are moments when they back me against the wall -- have you ever tried explaining Helter Skelter to an international student -- or an American student, for that matter?

The majority of the students I have worked with so far, as indicated earlier, are from Iran and Saudi Arabia, with a smattering from Venezuela, Japan, China, Puerto Rico and Guatemala.

One particular difficulty is that all of the students are at different levels of proficiency and trying to reach all twenty to twenty-two students per class can be trying. I really feel in the instance of this particular course, smaller classes are desirable.

Much of what I use as a starting point for discussion in the classroom stems from the many problems the foreign student experiences because of a communication problem.

Many of our students have moved from a very rigid structure to our society in which we have fewer and different restrictions. They are also unaware of our unconscious American taboos, and they lack knowledge of our guidelines for behavior, as in female-male relationships and roles. In the Arabian countries their religion strictly forbids the use of alcohol, so most of the students have had no experience with alcoholic beverages. Here they begin to observe American young people and feel pressures from their American acquaintances as well as their peers from their own country. Understandably, some begin to abuse their new-found freedom and have problems from partying too much and drinking to excess.

They face financial problems because they don't know how to budget their money well. Many have automobiles, but don't realize that they must budget their money for the upkeep of the automobile. Many run out of money before the end of the month. Another financial problem is the cost of illness in a capitalistic society. Some of these students have always had their families to take care of their medical problems, and others come from socialistic countries in which medical care is taken care of by the government. Here they have to pay for their own medical expenses. Also, some students find medical care here is better and more easily available than in their home countries, so they are taking advantage of this opportunity while in our country. An example is that some students are having dental work done here because they would not be able to get such care when they return home. (By the way, medical bills for the students from Saudi Arabia are sent to Houston.)

Another problem which many of these students face is politics. Politics in their homeland often cause worries about family, property, and visas. The political problem of Iranians is particularly strong. We have some students who are pro-Shah and others who are anti-Shah; both groups are vehement. Probably the majority of Iranian students at SPJC are anti-Shah. All the expenses of the Iranian students here are paid for by their families, and the parents must post a bond to guarantee the return of a student to the homeland. Many forfeit the bond when the students decide not to return to Iran.

Further problems arise because of the difference in time concept. The students are often tardy or absent from class excessively because of their different time concept. Instructors must work with the students carefully and intensively in order to help them grasp our western ideas toward time, punctuality, and attendance in class.

A major problem is cheating among the Middle Eastern students. This is related to their attitudes toward helping each other survive and toward face-saving. It is also related to the great pressures which they have to succeed

in their college course in the United States. These factors combined make the students do anything to succeed in a course -- cheat, copy, lie, use money, etc. They seem to have less of a feeling of guilt or conscious qualms than we expect American students to have toward this educational and cultural taboo of cheating. A related problem is that of confrontation. If an Arabian student is placed in a confrontation situation, he won't back down or retract, even if he is proven wrong; this is related to his attitude toward the necessity of saving face. Instructors who have worked with these students believe it is best to avoid such confrontations and to explain instead of accuse.

A final problem of the international student in St. Petersburg is that of exploitation by businessmen in the community. We have received several reports of exorbitant rents, car repair bills, medical and dental bills, and phone installation fees. Related to this exploitation is the difficulty which many students have in locating a suitable place to live.

Most of the students from the Middle East are intelligent young men who will return to their home countries and become the leaders of those countries. While they are here, they must succeed and make a good appearance. Except for a few playboys, they are serious and want to learn, but they do have academic difficulties centered around their deficiencies in the English language.

Instructors who have worked with these students agree that they need patience, tolerance, and a sense of humor. Instructors teaching foreign students should be aware of the problems the students face in our culture and aware that they will have academic problems as well. One of their major problems has been finding suitable teaching materials. These instructors realize that there are pros and cons to placing the foreign student in specialized classes. The biggest disadvantage in specialized classes is the isolation from Americans and the American culture. However, most agree that the international students have such monumental language problems that special sections and special approaches as well as special materials are needed to help them academically. As we teach our present foreign students and as our program for foreign students expands as it is expected to in the future, we instructors must keep our goals and the goals of the students in perspective. To most of them, English will remain, at most, a second language when they return to their native lands. Their purpose at St. Petersburg Junior College is to acquire a basic minimal command of English for success or survival in their education in an English-speaking country. Our purpose is to help them acquire this basic command of English, not to require of them the fluency we expect of native-born speakers of English.